A nursing intervention for quality use of medicines by elderly community clients

International Journal of Nursing Practice. 10, 4, 166-176

Community nurses can have an important role in medication management. This study looked at 113 older people who were taking more than 12 doses of medication per day. Interventions were various and included: assessment of the client/carer’s ability to administer medications; education of clients on the purpose and side effects of their medication; introduction of a supportive system of administration such as blister packs; notification of GP or pharmacist about problems with medication; review of adherence one month after any change in medication. Participants were asked to self-report on adherence with the following questions: Do you ever forget your medication? When you feel better do you sometimes stop taking your medication? Sometimes, if you feel worse when taking your medicine do you stop taking it?

A subgroup of 24 participants showed diminished knowledge or ability to manage medication. Problems included inability to differentiate between tablets of similar colour. This group of patients was followed up four weeks after the intervention and showed improved adherence to their medication regime.

Nursing home residents’ dependence and independence

Journal of Clinical Nursing. 13, 6, 677-686

Environmental events such as poor interaction with staff can lead to increased dependency in nursing home residents. This paper used systematic observations of residents’ behaviour relating to independence during mealtimes. The study showed that residents might ask for help in doing tasks they could do for themselves in order to retain control or communicate with staff. When staff talked informally to residents during meals, the residents’ independent activity was seen to increase. However, residents’ attempts at social interaction met with variable response and were often ignored. The authors conclude that meal times provide a good opportunity to encourage independence and enhance social activity. Systematic observation can be used to demonstrate to staff whether they respond appropriately to residents’ behaviour.


An exercise programme to improve fall-related outcomes in elderly nursing home residents

Applied Nursing Research. 17, 1, 21-31

There is mounting evidence that exercise can reduce falls in frail older people. From a sample group of 81, participants were divided into control and intervention groups. The intervention consisted of three months of supervised ankle strengthening and walking exercises carried out three times a week. Ankle strengthening exercises involved standing upright holding on to the back of chair and slowly raising the heels until the weight is on the balls of the feet. This is repeated 10 to 15 times. Ankle weights were added as performance improved. Subjects then walked for as near to ten minutes as they could tolerate. The intervention group showed significant improvement and this was still apparent three months after the exercise programme finished. The researchers suggest that nursing home staff can easily be trained to use a simple exercise programme that can reduce both the number of falls and the fear of falling.


Taking the community into the home

Health and Social Care in the Community. 12, 5, 448-453

This paper describes a system for caring for people with dementia that is tailored to their previous lifestyle. People are carefully assessed so that they can be assigned to the group that most closely matches their cultural norm. One group might have lace tablecloths and sherry before meals whilst another group, those who enjoy homemaking, might have the opportunity to help with everyday tasks such as cleaning and the preparation of meals. Activities are never forced; they are simply available and matched to the individual’s cultural and preferred norms. The authors claim that clients cared for in this way gain confidence and interact more fully with family and carers. Staff reported increased job satisfaction and this was reflected in reduced staff turnover.

Ruth Sander scans a range of journals and highlights their relevance for nurses who work with older people


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Carlsson E, Ehrenberg A, Ehnfors M

Stroke and eating difficulties: the long term experiences

Journal of Clinical Nursing. 13, 7, 825-834

Problems with eating after suffering a stroke are usually considered from the functional perspective. This qualitative study aimed to take a different approach by finding out what it is like to live with eating difficulties. Eating and drinking are central to many of our social and cultural activities and the authors suggest that it is an important part of our experience of ‘being a person’.

Participants mentioned a range of problems from fear of choking to humiliation at the need to be fed. The findings were interpreted as one major theme of ‘striving to be normal’. This was broken into three sub themes: abandoned to learn on one’s own, experiences of loss, and feeling dependent. The authors conclude that nurses need to develop clinical guidelines that address both emotional and functional aspects of eating.

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